SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR MANAGING NOTIFICATIONS, NOTIFICATION SUBSCRIPTIONS AND SUBSCRIBER RESPONSES WHILE MAINTAINING SUBSCRIBER AND SUBSCRIBER DATA PRIVACY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of priority of U.S. provisional application No. 62/643,997 filed 16 Mar. 2018, the contents of which are herein incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to data communication and, more particularly, to a system and method for managing notifications, notification subscriptions and subscriber responses while maintaining subscriber data privacy.

For a "Provider," such as a company, a healthcare organization, a hotel, a professional (e.g., a doctor, an accountant, a lawyer, a consultant), manually keeping track of Customers who have requested to be notified about a subject they are interested in, along with their preferred contact information, can be time-consuming and error-prone. A "Customer" might be a client, a patient, a guest, a traveler, or any other type of a consumer or a business that receives a service or some value from a Provider. The "List" of Customers who have requested to be notified, if maintained by hand, may become unwieldy and out of date. Customer contact information (such as mobile phone numbers or email addresses) may get recorded incorrectly, which can result in the wrong person being notified while an intended Customer misses a notification. This problem is compounded because the subjects of notifications may be numerous and vary on a daily basis. As an example, a notification can be sent out about a change in a Provider's schedule due to a cancellation of an existing appointment, or about the fact that the Provider is starting to accept new Customers. Furthermore, special regulations about the privacy of Customer data may apply in a number of industries and countries, requiring Providers to protect the privacy of their Customers' identities and customer data.

Likewise, for Customers it can be time-consuming and inconvenient to periodically contact their Provider to inquire about the status of the subject about which they would like to be notified (e.g., about last-minute cancellations, or whether the Provider is accepting new Customers). As a result, Providers may incur downtime or lose an opportunity to offer value and generate income, while Customers can miss an opportunity to receive value.

Thus, for both Provider and Customer, managing notifications and inquiries may be too tedious to do manually and too voluminous to maintain satisfactory accuracy through the current systems that use spreadsheets, word processing software, or paper records to manually maintain a List of Customers who want to be notified about changes in a Provider's status. As a result, once a change in the status of the Provider occurs, contacting one Customer on the List at a time, leaving a voicemail and waiting for their response, is also time-consuming and labor-intensive. Moreover, notified customers may not be able to respond in time, resulting in the Provider missing an opportunity to provide value and generate income. And so, Customers who have not been notified will not have an opportunity to take advantage of the change in the Provider's status, which may impact their ability to receive value from the Provider.

In other words, keeping track of a list of Customers who want to receive notifications and contacting them one by one to notify them when a need arises, is a manual effort fraught with obstacles. A list of Customers manually maintained by a Provider can get out of date, or contain inaccurate contact information (e.g., a Customer's phone number can be written incorrectly by the Provider's staff). Customers may receive notifications that they are no longer interested in. Customers have to contact the Provider to ask to be removed from the List in order to stop receiving notifications. Customers on a list may not receive notifications in time due to the limited number of contact methods available to the Provider to notify the Customers, who, for example, may not be able to answer the phone call from their Provider. Plus, Customers may not be able to respond to the Provider in time.

As can be seen, there is a need for a system and method for managing notifications, notification subscriptions and subscriber responses while maintaining subscriber data privacy that for Providers does the following: eliminates a need for the tedious process of manually keeping track of Customers who have requested to be notified about a subject in which they're interested; guarantees the accuracy of the Customer's contact info, while preserving their privacy, and complying with privacy laws and regulations about Customer data; streamlines and simplifies the time-consuming and labor intensive process of notifying Customers who have opted in to receive Provider notifications, while preserving flexibility for Providers to pick and choose which of the Customers to notify; and consolidates and aggregates Customer responses to notifications simplifying a process for selecting which Customer to engage with (as opposed to relying on Customers to call the Provider one by one to express their interest, which would require the Provider to manually track which of the Customers responded, etc.). The system of the present invention is also adapted to address these issues for Customers: eliminates a need for Customers to continue to periodically contact their Provider to inquire about the status on a subject they are interested in; enables Customers to choose how they get notified depending on the subject, making it more convenient and reliable; provides peace of mind to Customers that their request to receive notifications will be properly managed with minimized risk for a human error (as an example, their Provider forgetting to notify them, or using a wrong email or phone number for them); and simplifies sending responses to their Provider (as opposed to requiring them to contact their Provider, e.g., by phone or email to express their interest).

The present invention allows Customers to subscribe to receive different types of notifications offered by a Provider in a way that is most convenient for them, such as by email, mobile phone, voice call, or mobile app. Different "Channels" can be used for different types of notifications, or for different types of subject areas. For example: a Channel for notifications about changes in Provider's availability for follow up appointments with existing Customers; a Channel for notifications about changes in a Provider's availability for appointments with new (first-time) Customers; a Channel for notifications about new offers and promotions; a Channel for notifications about unplanned office closures or delays (for example, due to inclement weather or other emergency) and/or a Channel for notifications about new developments, tips, recommendations, or research studies. Therefore, Customers can choose which methods of contact to use for different Channels; for instance, they can select